the "talented tenth," many of whom were mulatto and could trace their station to inherited wealth from white relatives. Most were community leaders who owned homes and sent their children to college. She conceded that some of these people were "too white" and could not easily merge with darker-skinned blacks from other classes, but that "passing" as white for these upper-class blacks was also considered a form of racial "treason." The next group of blacks in the city was defined by Beam as middle class and few in number. These people owned homes on the fringes of the city. As described by Beam, the lowest level of black society was occupied by poor, dark-skinned laborers who rented substandard housing and who had moved into the city from the countryside. She recalled that this class was "anonymous" and was in constant motion, frequently changing jobs. [64]

Many whites possibly viewed the advances of the black community as a threat to the overall good of the white community. For example, local author Harry Hayden repeated the cry of white workers in 1898 who claimed that blacks were given priority in hiring by employers. Writing in 1936, he indicated that most of the city's artisans were black and that the city was "becoming a Mecca for Negroes and a City of Lost Opportunities for the working class whites." Hayden explained that most of the bricklayers, carpenters, and mechanics were black, a trend that can be traced to the 1860 when those jobs were the only ones relegated to the black worker.[65] As a response, the Democratic Party began to develop discriminatory economic platforms, urging white employers to hire only white workers.[66]

Plans Laid to Force the End of Fusion

Responding to the problems faced by the Democratic Party, an economic downturn as a result of a panic in 1893, general economic depression in 1897, and the perceived increase in African American prosperity and political control, many prominent white leaders in the city began to meet in private. The men believed that if they did not regain control of the city's political machine, they could not prosper—whoever controlled the city government also controlled its purse, taxation policy, and internal improvements agenda.[67] Further, without such control, prominent businesses could not be wooed to relocate to the port city. The promise of major investors and outside business enterprises in the city after Democratic victory presented a tangible impetus for white business leaders to take matters into their own hands. In order to promote the city, they believed that they had to be in control; otherwise, investors would

[64] Beam's findings are supported by other scholarly works by historians such as Bart Landry in *The* New *Black Middle Class,* Joel Williamson in works such as *New People, Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the Untied States*. Lura Beam, *He Called Them by the Lightning: A Teacher's Odyssey in the Negro South, 1908-1919* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 40-42.

[65] Hayden, a local Wilmington journalist and author, worked to explain the tensions that led to the riot in 1898 in his work, *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion.* Further documenting the event, Hayden also wrote a complete history of the Wilmington Light Infantry, which was presented by that group's members to the New Hanover County Public Library. Although tainted with rhetoric reminiscent of the 1898 and 1900 white supremacy campaigns, the two works offer valuable insights into the actions of the white leaders responsible for the political frenzy that resulted in the violence and the coup d'etat of November 10, 1898. Harry Hayden, *The Story of the Wilmington Rebellion* (Wilmington, N.C.: the author, 1936), 2.

[66] Similar thought processes regarding the "negro problem" developed to address the issue from both the white and black perspective throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Prather, *We Have Taken a City,* 61-62.

[67] Michael Honey, "Class, Race and Power," *Democracy Betrayed,* 171.